LELAND INITIATIVE END-USER ASSESSMENT:
TRIP REPORT/NEXT STEPS--BOTSWANA

Linda Leonard and Jeff Bland visited the USAID regional mission Gaborone, Botswana for ten days (July 31-August 9) with the following objectives:

1. Discuss the use of information and communication in the Regional Center for Southern Africa's four SO areas;

2. Explore the current and potential uses of information and communication by RCSA's partners, as well as by other development-related organizations in Botswana.

Over the course of our stay, we met with each SO team--or team leader--and were briefed on their current use of information and communication, particularly the Internet. These meetings produced two main findings:

1. Although the RCSA has a VSAT connection to the Internet and although most individuals stated that they use the Internet, there was in general a low level of understanding of the entire range of the Internet's services and benefits;

2. The most pressing need for RCSA partners, as perceived by mission personnel themselves, is E-mail connectivity. While full Internet access is certainly a worthy long-term goal, many felt that there is not yet an adequate level of basic communication among partners themselves and between partners and the mission. As such, a focus on enabling E-mail connectivity--even without full Internet services to go along with the E-mail--would be more beneficial in the short-term.

In addition to mission personnel, we also met with a number of RCSA partners in Gaborone. These included the Institute of Development Management, the Regional Telecommunications Restructuring Program, the Botswana Centre for Human Rights; the Democracy Research Project; the Botswana National Productivity Centre; and Botswana Telecommunications Corporation. Some the main findings/concerns uncovered there include:

1. Mirroring the mission's concerns, there was little use of E-mail by partners;

2. While most organizations were aware of the Internet, few actually have access to it--those that do make long-distance phone calls to Internet Service Providers in South Africa. There was confusion about when the Internet would be readily available in Botswana. Many had heard that Botswana Telecom would make it available earlier in the summer; however, the date would also get pushed back, so there was little faith in having Internet access soon;

3. Botswana Telecom is presently working with Sprint to bring an Internet gateway to Botswana by the end of the year. They are currently planning to offer "wholesale" Internet service to retail Internet Service Providers, who would then actually handle connecting individuals and businesses to the Internet. In the short-term Botswana Telecom is most concerned with devising pricing structures for this service.

Suggestions and Recommendations for the Future

1. Since improved communication and information sharing within the Region forms the backbone of the RCSA program, the Leland Initiative should provide a training program to the Mission staff on how to develop a communication/information strategy; introduction to and hands on training on electronic tools (including the Internet) which can be used effectively within the region; introduction to the role of technology and the Internet for development purposes. (see Annex A, outline of course given Internet course given at USAID/Jakarta)

2. Implement a pilot project demonstrating the use of electronic communication technics for a regional program. Clearly the Leland Initiative would be very interested in participating in the design and implementation of a regional project that could be replicated in other regions, while RCSA would be interested in replication in other sectors within the same region. Lessons learned would be extremely valuable for both parties.

It was agreed at the time of debriefing that the team members would further develop the pilot project idea and send more in-depth information to the RCSA at the end of the fiscal year when individuals would have more time to respond. These ideas have been put forth in a concept paper (Annex B).

Following is a brief paper we presented to the RCSA for "next steps" to take to improve connectivity and the use of information in the region. RCSA was very receptive to the ideas and suggestions offered and seems ready to move forward with some of these within a few months.

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE AGE OF INTERNET: A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVED COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION

INTRODUCTION

As stated in the *Strategic Start-Up Framework for the ISA*, strategy will focus on:

a) Getting key regional stakeholders to search for new ways of promoting regional cooperation;

b) Creating new ways to identify and respond to important unmet needs of underserved stakeholders

c) Mobilizing financial and technical resources from many sources;

d) Developing innovative program management and implementation arrangements; and

e) Enticing increased collaboration amongst regional stakeholders, between regional stakeholders and USAID constituent groups, as well as increased collaboration between USAID and other donors.

To some degree, the Internet can be an effective tool for achieving the above results. It can do so first and foremost by making communications between all Internet users easier, faster, more flexible, more powerful--and cheaper. Within five years, E-mail (at the least) and Internet (at the most) will be as essential to most organizations, governments, and businesses as word-processing programs are now. The Internet is bringing the world together in a way barely dreamed of just five years ago. Schoolchildren routinely communicate with peers worldwide (translation software will soon make language barriers irrelevant as well). News travels almost instantaneously and up-to-date editions of newspapers and journals are available anywhere there is Internet. Considering the myriad of ways in which the Internet is making the world a smaller place, it holds great promise for bringing southern Africa together as well.

Benefits of/Barriers to Internet Use

In brief, a few of the benefits offered by the Internet include:

a) Improved communication, administration, and logistics;

b) Ability to share experiences and lessons learned;

c) Ability to create a regional knowledge base;

d) Improved cooperation for solution to regional problems; and

e) Ability to disseminate research and publications relevant to regional joint projects.

Barriers to Internet use include:

a) Poor telecommunications infrastructure/telephone lines;

b) Outdated (or simply obstructionist) telecommunications policies, often advanced by a state-owned telecommunications company that stands to lose from liberalization;

c) High telecommunications costs, often resulting from "b" above;

d) Lack of/high cost of telecommunications equipment;

e) Lack of technical knowledge for installation and maintenance of computer systems and hardware;

f) Countries–as well as organizations–at vastly different levels within the region. Existence of computer "haves" and "have-nots;"

g) Lack of widespread experience with and use of computers; and

h) Lack of an "information culture" within society (i.e., widespread lack of appreciation for the value of information or an understanding of how it can be used effectively).

STEP ONE: E-MAIL CONNECTIVITY

Bringing full Internet connectivity to a wide range of organizations within a country can be a long and difficult process. This is especially true when policy is ill-suited to advanced telecommunications, when a "computer/information culture" is nascent or non-existent, and when information infrastructure is poor; unfortunately, such is the case in most of southern Africa. Nonetheless, organizations can benefit from more advanced telecommunications and information exchange in spite of these constraints. In most cases, any individual with a computer, a modem, and a telephone line can connect to others via E-mail.

1. The mission should identify key SADC partners that would be the best candidates for basic E-mail. There are scores of organizations across the twelve ISA countries and four SOs, so only select organizations will be able to receive assistance. Assistance could be provided on all four SO fronts at once, or one specific SO could be targeted as a "test bed" for initial efforts. Lessons learned could then be incorporated into subsequent work in the other SO areas. The following criteria could be used to make selections:

a) Selected organizations must have the basic computer infrastructure, in terms of machines and human skills, if they wish to use e-mail. USAID needs to target organizations that can "hit the ground running" and that can help other organizations once they are up to speed. It may not be cost effective to supply computers and basic training for E-mail connectivity, but if an organization would appear to benefit enough from E-mail alone, providing computers might be worthwhile.

b) AfricaLink is the best resource for this activity; however, in the interest of getting as many organizations access to E-mail as quickly as possible, the mission should not hesitate to use other projects such as "Toolnet" and "Healthnet."

c) One possible target to aim for would be to hook up one organization in each SO in each ISA country, yielding about 50 organizations to be connected--this seems like a reasonable number to strive for in, say, six mon

2. Once the 50 or so groups have E-mail access, there must be ways to ensure that:

a) They (or at least one person in the organization) know how to use the system;

b) They use their E-mail instead of letting the system gather dust;

c) They know how to contact one another and have access to useful applications (like discussion gro

3. One organization or even individual should operate as an electronic communications "clearinghouse". Its functions could include:

a) Maintaining a directory of current E-mail users, adding new users/organizations to the directory as they come on-line. This list could be distributed--via E-mail of course--to all SADC participants on a weekly basis or a

b) Maintaining a "listserv" on general issues germane to SADC members. This listserv could be general at first, generating interest in the concept. As demands for additional listservs arise, other groups/individuals could take on the responsibility of maintaining those (i.e., an NGO focussed on agriculture could maintain an agricultural l

c) Serving as a central "help desk" for E-mail related questions (hopefully, most of these questions could come via E-mail);

d) Maintaining a repository of electronic documents on the general use of E-mail, listservs, etc.

These functions together constitute a fairly large responsibility for one individual/organization. It should not be expected that a group could or would be willing to take this on without additional resources. Funding for a full-time person knowledgeable in this area--who could keep this resource center (actually, the "center" could simply be a computer with all the electronic information in its hard drive) going--would represent a wise investment indeed. The rewards of an E-mail connected SADC using the tools described above would not only yield immediate payoffs in administrative efficiency and new-found communication, but would also lay the groundwork for more effective use of full Internet once it becomes available.

STEP TWO: BUILDING ON THE E-MAIL FOUNDATION

E-mail connectivity represents a first step on the path to harnessing the Internet's considerable potential for information dissemination, exchange, and retrieval. It is a benefit that can be provided to a significant number of partners in a relatively short period of time. Full Internet connectivity will be longer in coming for most SADC countries, but the technology offers several very useful services in addition to E-mail.

"Full" Internet Applications

a) Local access of remote databases and the ability to retrieve files from those databases. For example, a user in

Gaborone could use the Internet to identify "servers" (remote databases) dealing with sorghum research. With a click of the mouse, the user could then choose a server from the list and connect to it--let's say this particular one is at the USDA offices in Greenbelt, Maryland. He or she could then search the database for occurrences of specific "keywords"--let's say he or she is looking for documents on "drought resistance". The remote server would then search all the full-text documents that reside in its database for the occurrence of those two words. It would then fetch the relevant documents and send a list of the applicable documents to the searcher in Gaborone. The searcher could then retrieve one or more of these documents--the document now resides on the user's computer in Gaborone. The user can now do whatever he or she wants with it--print in out, send it via E-mail to another person, load it into WordPerfect and manipulate its contents, etc.

b) The ability to "publish" documents on the Internet. The flip-side to getting information as described above is making one's own information available to other Internet users. Publications can be disseminated in a highly-polished form through the use of "Web pages". Especially with the advent of commercial software packages designed for formatting documents for this purpose, posting documents on a Web page is simple once the proper hardware is in place. With a Web page presence, organizations can not only make their research available to the tens of millions of other users on the Internet, but can also advertise their presence as well.

c) Provide searchable directories of data and information. The Internet's World Wide Web feature can be used to solicit information from users and put this information into database format. For example, a web site could utilize the web's "forms" feature to gather general information on related organizations. When the form feature is invoked, an electronic form appears with blank areas where the user can type in appropriate information (name, phone number, address, etc.). When the user clicks on the button labelled "done", the info he or she has placed on the form is automatically stored in the appropriate database; since the information is already categorized, the database's contents can be easily manipulated, transmitted, and printed. This represents an extremely powerful tool for generating user directories, mailing lists (E-mail or otherwise), and so forth.

d) In the long-term, the Internet will certainly be commonly used for "teleconferencing". Long-term actually means now in certain parts of the world where bandwidth can support the application. In Southern Africa, the capacity for this is probably at least two years away, but when it becomes available, it will offer considerable cost savings (from reduced airfare) for organizations willing and able to make the investment.

Full Internet connectivity generally requires the presence of Internet Service Providers (ISPs). Unlike E-mail, where FIDONET connections currently exist in most SADC countries, ISPs exist on a commercial level only in South Africa and Zambia. Mozambique and Zimbabwe have full Internet as well, but only at their universities. Thus, widespread use of full-Internet services in most SADC member-states will first require the formation of ISP industries. This can be a complicated process and, in many African countries, involves overcoming government policy barriers that act as an immediate brake on provision of the Internet. The Leland Initiative is working on effecting these policy changes and is addressing technical and training issues as well.
Once ISP networks are in place, SADC partners can be given the assistance they need in connecting to the Internet. Technical assistance could take the following forms.

First Steps for Internet Connectivity and Use

a) Identification of ISPs within the partners' geographic areas. To connect to the Internet, an organization must first

contact a business that offers Internet connectivity. Preferably, the ISP will be within range of a local phone, thereby reducing phone charges while connected to the Internet. In some cases, however, Internet connectivity may be worth a long-distance phone call to a neighboring country if the service is not available locally. Whatever the case, if only one ISP exists, then the choice is simple. However, if the partner has the luxury of choosing from more than one ISP, then choosing the best service could be complicated as ISPs typically offer a number of different pricing/service packages to satisfy a range of needs.

b) Provision of basic computer hardware. Again, as with E-mail connectivity, it may not be feasible to provide new computers to organizations for Internet access alone--this is especially true for full Internet use, since Internet use beyond E-mail generally requires a 486-class machine or above. However, modems might be a good investment if they are the only barrier to a partner connecting to the Net.

Dealing with hardware problems will be an ongoing issue since servicing is unavailable, inadequate, or relatively expensive in much of southern Africa. There are currently no easy answers to this issue--considering maintenance problems, however, the choice of relatively simple (i.e., with few "bells and whistles," such as CD-rom drives, sound cards, microphones, etc.) machines of good reputation and with external modems (easier to access and send off for servicing than internal modems) would be desirable. Laptop/notebook computers can be good choices in terms of maintenance, since they can be shipped off for repair easily and cheaply relative to much heavier and larg

c) Training and improvement of end-user applications. Getting connected is simply the first step. The Internet's eclectic nature can also make it daunting to use, especially for individuals and organizations with little prior computer experience. New software, such as Netscape Navigator and Microsoft explorer, go a long way towards alleviating this problem through their ease of use and intuitive control panels. These programs could be likened to "Windows" software for the Internet--just as the difference between Windows and DOS is huge, so is the difference between using Netscape to surf the Web and doing the same with UNIX line commands. Even so, finding the information you need can often be like finding a needle in a haystack. There is simply a vast, vast amount of information available on the Internet, and new users would benefit greatly from learning about the best strategies for sifting through all this information.

STEP THREE: GETTING THE MOST FROM THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

By the time an organization is ready to really use the Internet to its fullest, it almost certainly will have done the following, not necessarily in this order:

a) It has been using E-mail for some time and incorporates its use as an important daily tool.

b) It has an extensive portfolio of routine E-mail contacts and knows how to seek out organizations/individuals for which it doesn't already have addresses.

c) It knows what organizations in its field of interest are "teleconnected," how to contact them via E-mail, and what they have to offer.

d) It has a certain level of understanding of what the Internet has to offer. Staff members know it exists and some

feel comfortable with "surfing" the Web. At this stage, there will probably be a small number of "technology embracers" on staff who are enamored of the technology, but in general the Web is used for simple file downloads an

"Leapfrogging"

The series of steps described above is not always applicable. Unlike most of the developed world, where information technologies such as computers and E-mail have been in use for some time and where progress in information utilization has generally occurred as soon as the technology becomes available, most of Africa is only now beginning to take advantage of this technology. While lack of computerization certainly represents lost opportunities thus far, it does have a bright side.

With the advent of Internet, southern Africa countries can "leapfrog" the incremental steps towards computerization that have occurred in the developed world. This means that partners not only gain the most advanced information tools at once, but--since many are only now beginning to computerize--they also can buy the most appropriate hardware to do so right now, thus avoiding the hardware "obsolescence" that organizations in developed countries now grap

Progressing to the "Second Level"

Using the Internet to its fullest becomes mainly a question of training and organization at this point. Most users have developed a general familiarity with the technology and are comfortable using it. In other words, "first level" barriers--connecting to the Internet, learning how to use its basic applications, and getting as many staff as possible to use it--have been overcome.

Addressing "second level" applications is more complicated. These second level applications include using the World Wide Web as a powerful research tool, harnessing the Internet's power for management/organizational improvement, disseminating organizational information and publications to other Internet users (effectively creating an Internet "presence." These applications are more problematic for two reasons:

a) Unlike first level applications, higher-level Internet uses can be as varied as one's imagination. Accordingly, each institution must decide for itself how it will use the Internet most effectively. Something like videoconferencing may be extremely useful and cost-effective for one small business, yet may represent a waste of money for another. Moreover, an organization would benefit from an information/communications strategy that is broader than the Internet alone (but which should certainly include the use of Internet to its fullest).

b) Since second-level applications are typically much more targeted to particular "special interests," appropriate training and resources are less widely available than for first-level uses such as E-mail. Accordingly, it is vital that information/communications strategies and procedures be "institutionalized". In other words, an organization's effective use of Internet and information technologies should not depend upon or reside in one individual alone. If this happens, then the organization's effective use of information may vanish as soon as that one individual leaves. Thus, it is vital that advanced Internet/information technology use become a daily routine for as many users as possible rather than simply a mandate forced from somewhere above.

Fortunately, once individuals and the organization as a whole realize what the technology offers, it will become an integral part of the daily routine because in the long-run it makes everyone's job easier and makes the organization more efficient

and effective.

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

Connectivity/Identification/Communication

a) Work closely with the AfricaLink project to provide SADC partners with E-mail connectivity. Consider providing funding, if necessary, to assist in this step. Enlist the aid of organization such as Toolnet if the demand for E-mail connections requires. Internet connectivity beyond E-mail, as stated before, depends on a variety of factors. A number of donor efforts to bring full Internet to sub-Saharan Africa are underway and, combined with movement towards telecommunications liberalization by several SADC countries, will hopefully lead to widespread Internet availability within a few years.

b) Designate an organization(s) or individual(s) as coordinator(s) for E-mail/Internet users. There could be one coordinator for all four ISA strategic objectives, a coordinator for each of the four SOs, or even a coordinator or coordinators for some or all of SADC's seven foci. The point is, coordination of this effort is critical; otherwise, partners' utilization of their e-mail connection attain its maximum potential.

Coordination

c) Make the coordinator's first priority the identification of SADC partners' Internet status. The coordinator can do this in coordination with USAID missions, the AfricaLink project, the Leland Initiative and by using published mailing lists, and other resources--all this could be done via the Internet as well. The next step could be to bring these organizations together by sending directories of SADC E-mail/Internet users to all users, by soliciting and disseminating announcements of upcoming events and meetings, by forming listservs, and by providing helpful information on Internet service availability, training resources, etc.

d) Ensure that the coordinator's role remains a fluid one. In other words, although E-mail coordination and utilization will be important and useful initially, the need for this basic service should eventually decline or become self-sustaining. From that point, the coordinator's role could evolve into that of an Internet facilitator. The coordinator would then move into helping out with the "second level" applications and issues discussed earlier. SADC partners' transition from first level to second level Internet applications should be much smoother and more fruitful if they receive guidance throughout the process.

Training

e) Provide assistance in the form of training/funding for training for Internet users. The Leland Initiative will address this area for full Internet users, but there are a number of current E-mail users who could benefit from this at p

POTENTIAL INTERNET APPLICATIONS BY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Strengthened Democratic Processes and Values

a) Newspapers can publish on the Web, thus reaching a much larger potential audience and spreading word of democratic injustices quickly and broadly.

b) Constitutions, legislation, and judicial rulings can be made available over the Internet. The information can be released essentially at once and at little cost. Furthermore, it will be much more "searchable" and user-friendly than reams of hardbound text are.

c) Special interest groups can organize and advertise via the Internet, making their existence known to users worldwide and disseminating the information they feel is valuable to millions.

d) The Internet could prove invaluable as a coordinating tool for regional and intracountry initiatives concerning human rights, voting, and so forth. It could also serve to make the monitoring of human rights, voting, etc. much easier and quicker. Instances of human rights abuses can be widely reported quickly and forces can be marshalled to deal with the situation quickly.

Increased Indigenous Business Development and Ownership

a) Businesses and associations can "advertise" for capital using the World Wide Web. In fact, many innovative SMEs in the United States and elsewhere have found the Web to be a useful tool for advertising their wares (as doing a search for "ostrich farm" on the Web will prove). Investors world-wide are surely beginning to appreciate the power of the Internet as a research tool, so having a presence there could prove fortuitous.

b) The World Wide Web provides an ideal vehicle for marketing and selling goods. In the short-term, it would be relatively easy for even the smallest of businesses to post a Web page. In the longer-term, with the availability of "secure transaction" lines (allowing for safe use of credit cards for Web purchases), businesses could even take orders on the Internet and ship products to consumers worldwide.

c) Business associations can benefit from the communications, research, publications, and organizational/administration capabilities of the Internet. Broad use of the Internet by association members would cut down on costs previously incurred by faxing/phoning long-distance, as well as travel costs. The association can make its publications available to members on a Web page. The Internet could be used to gather and process general information on member activities. Finally, the Internet can be used as a research tool for designing association activities and policies.

Sustainable Increase in Productivity of Agriculture and Natural Resources by Smallholders

a) The Internet would prove valuable to agriculture research organizations in a variety of ways. It could be used for basic research on crops and livestock, since many other agricultural research organizations make their publications and research available on the Internet. The Internet could be used to coordinate agricultural research--a single Web page, for

example, could serve as a central depository for relevant organizations' research, thereby allowing instant access to–and feedback from--similar organizations within and without the SADC network.

b) The Internet could be used as a powerful monitoring and reporting mechanism. Data from far-flung regions could be electronically sent to a central site for synthesis and analysis. Furthermore, if the data is of a time-sensitive nature (such as weather reports and information on disease outbreaks), use of the Internet offers a considerable advantage over any other method of data delivery.

c) Smallholders themselves would benefit from information readily available on the Internet. A few examples of available information include weather information (even satellite images); current international prices for commodities of all types; projections and analysis for commodity prices (although much of this information would surely be fee-based); information on innovative farming techniques; information/alerts on disease and pest infestations; and many others. Considering the isolated nature of farming, the Internet represents an ideal way to bring the outside world to a smallholder's remote corner.

Increased Efficiency, Reliability and Competitiveness of Regional Transport and Telecommunications

a) Telecommunications infrastructure and the Internet are obviously closely related. Improvements in Internet access would itself constitute an improvement in telecom infrastructure and vice-versa.

b) Shipping can be coordinated via the Internet. Whether by rail, road, or water, the Internet's advantages in terms of speed and (in the near future) ubiquity will make it a first choice for identifying the most efficient means of transporting goods and tracking those goods as they cross check-points *en route* to their destination, however far away that may be and regardless of a change in modality (for example, if the product is transferred from the road to rail at some point). This can be particularly important for many agricultural goods, where spoilage can result from bottlenecks in distribution. Furthermore, if southern Africa is to harness the power of "just in time" manufacturing techniques (also known as "lean manufacturing"), the Internet should be enlisted to enable the precision timing and coordination critical to

SUPPORT OPTIONS

Leland Initiative

The Leland Initiative will be enhancing the environment for an infrastructure to support the commercial viability of Internet in the Southern African region. This will clearly be an asset to RCSA as it develops a regional program. The work of the TELCOMS project will also be very supportive in creating this environment. The Leland team should keep Wade Warren informed of all work being done in the region so they can support each other in their talks and ne

The Leland Initiative is also prepared to provide training to Mission staff and their partners on the use of Internet as a development tool.

AfricaLink

AfricaLink is uniquely equipped to provide initial hook-ups to e-mail or Internet for individual organizations, with start up training. It has extensive experience in this field and is already doing so in the agriculture sector.

CDIE/Research and Reference Services Project

Remember RCSA currently has $15,000 "in the bank" for R&RS services. R&RS has experience in communication/information strategy development; establishing and maintaining networks; writing, editing,publishing and disseminating both paper and electronic publications; managing electronic conferences and discussion groups; creating Regional Information Clearinghouse for Central America as well as the Africa Bureau Democracy/Governance Information Center; training in Information as a Development Tool; and basic research and information services. The R&RS contract allows for buy-ins in any of the above areas and also has a provision for development of additional regional information centers. This could be very helpful in providing guidance and support to RCSA's coordination needs in the networking, information dissemination and training arenas.

ANNEX A: COURSE OUTLINE, INTERNET TRAINING USAID/JAKARTA

Group Internet Training Sessions
Syllabus

I. Description of Internet
- INTERNET
  - Definition
  - Brief History
- Types of Internet Resources
  - Full-text, statistical and bibliographic databases
  - Electronic journals and discussion lists
  - Library catalogs
  - Internet search tools
  - Software and graphics
- Methods of Accessing Internet Resources
  - Email / Listservs
  - Telnet
  - File Transfer Protocol (FTP)
  - Gophers
  - World Wide Web (WWW)

II. How to get on the Internet
- Current use of Internet: Email
- Using Netscape to access the Internet

III. Key features and options in Netscape
- Opening up an HTML file
- Saving a page or file as a bookmark
- Printing and saving files (HTML, ASCII, etc.)
- Copying and pasting URLs and web page text
- Options in Netscape (Preferences, Home page setup)

IV. How to visit a home page
- Explore the USAID internal site, highlighting information on the NMS
- Visit 2 or 3 sites listed on the CDIE page bookmark
- Type in some URLs and save them as bookmarks
- Do a sample search using search tools
- Explore sites listed on the CDIE page bookmark

V. Questions and Answers

ANNEX B: BOTSWANA CONCEPT PAPER

Goal: Link RCSA Democracy partners electronically to facilitate sharing of ideas, communicate information on both a substantive and administrative level, as well as create a sense of community among the democracy players in the region.

First Steps

Feasibility Study

Perform a feasibility study to determine what would be required to connect the identified RCSA Democracy partners in the region. This study would look at developing a strategic approach; determine feasible time frame; prepare a scope of work for this activity; and provide cost information for the implementation.

Elements of the feasibility study will cover some of the following:

***** Initiate discussions on the vision of a communication strategy for the democracy program, includin

short term goals
mid term goals
long germ goals

***** Identify audiences for this communication strategy

***** Identify partners to be linked, and placing them in categories for priority of linkage, as well as groupings for special communication and sharing of ideas. For example the first priority of connection may be the Advisors for SARDF, while you may want to form a group of regional human rights organizations for discussions and sharing of ideas.

***** Develop strategy for connecting partners to email - since partners are located in areas where full Internet access is not available, the lowest common denominator method must be used to allow for full communication among the group. Therefore the goal will be only email connectivity.

***** Identify an organization to actually do the connecting, buy equipment and train technical staff.

Options:

Leland is creating a mechanism for Mission buyins to have this technical work completed AfricaLink may be able to do this if their scope is broadened IRM may have a mechanism in place for a buy-in by the Mission

***** Recommend training options for partners and USAID staff on electronic communication and disse practices

* On site in the Mission and at partners meetings/conferences

Suggested topics:

How to set up a Network
How to develop an institutional communication/information strategy
How to disseminate information electronically

***** Recommend possible communication tools to be put into place on this Democracy Network. Such

Electronic Bulletin Board
Guided/facilitated discussions
Listservs

The development of an organization that communicates effectively requires a great deal of effort. Institutional strengthening or capacity building to create an organization that uses information effectively, shares it appropriately and communicates effectively to the outside world, as you know, is a long arduous process. The last two asterik items are really just the tip of the iceberg. Once the technical tools are in place the hard work begins. Though I recognize that the technical issues are currently the most frustrating and difficult to solve, it is important not to ignore that the real objective, and where the most longterm effort will need to be placed, is the communication and information sharing

I hope you find this thinking helpful in your planning process. I look forward to hearing your reactions and certainly hope that we will be working together on this issue.